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PROTESTANTISM AND THE WORLD'S NECESSITIES

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[This is the third article of the series on World Restoration. The first, "Judaism and World Restoration," by the eminent rabbi, the Rev. Dr. Joseph Silverman, was in the August number; the second, "What Ails the World?" by the Rev. Martin J. Scott, S. J., was in the September number. In November Mr. Frederick Dixon will write from the Christian Science point of view.—THE EDITORS.]

PROTESTANTISM is a living branch of the Christian Ecclesia, bearing fruit after its kind, but capable of far more fruitfulness. As a world movement at the front of history for the last four centuries, it is not without the taint of reproach incidental to human admixture. Some of its developments, past and present, have shown that, as a rule, men are farther advanced in political than religious ideas. Fed by the faults as well as the virtues of its progenitors, it boasts no unblemished record, nor asserts for itself a fictitious infallibility. It must be received for its intrinsic values to society, which have been realized in every realm of life, and are not liable to extinction by ecclesiastical fiat. Constructed at infinite sacrifice, cemented with honest blood, productive of eminent spirits and manifold services, and resting upon principles which exercise a legitimate and wide dominion, Protestantism now confronts the world situation which tests the fitness of historic institutions and systems to survive. Shall it perish, or prove itself the master of a grave and well-nigh universal emergency? This is the core of the issue discussed

here, and also an indication of the indefeasible obligation, not only of Protestantism but of the Church Catholic, and not only of the Church Catholic but of all civilized and humane persons and States.

I

At the moment the outlook is not particularly cheerful. Professor E. A. Wodehouse, a considerate and keen observer, states that the churches at large, and specifically the Protestant churches, have lost touch with the thought movements of the age and no longer mould public opinion. In a period when every department of life and action vibrates with immense possibilities for good or evil, their voice is practically dumb. He further says it is a matter of general comment that while complicated and perplexing problems accumulate on every side, the churches offer no solutions. Moreover, in the vile genesis of war's intentioned outbreak, some churches played the harlot with the State, and supported its betrayal of Christendom. What counsel or direction can such pseudo-guardians give to our insurgent age? Without authority, remote from reality, unreal in attitude, bemused by things that are no more, they move in their diminishing spheres of retrospect and quotation, having no elucidation and little comfort for the ardent souls who fight the hard battles of outer life. The indictment reveals the academic in his less trustworthy and partial views. If the optimist believes too much because he sees too little, the pessimist complements him by seeing so much that he believes too little. One does not have wholly to acquiesce with Professor Wodehouse's severe arraignment in admitting that although the churches have shared in the general progress of the time, they have also paltered with some beggarly elements of reaction, cant, bigotry, and spurious liberalism. In the sequence they are heavily assessed: but they have means of payment and also of recovery.

Comparisons with the mediævalism which Protestantism shattered are often unfavorable to the latter system. The pre-Reformation period was certainly solidified by a common religion which incorporated its faith and politics in the Papacy and the Empire. Yet the supremacy of the spiritual power did not rep-

resent the undivided result of mediæval thinking on the subject, though we find much in contemporary writings which suggests that conclusion. The real task of the statesmen of the Middle Ages was to devise an efficient machinery for individual safety and social protection. This task was ever before them and conditioned their intellectual habits. It should be noted that they had a more distinct apprehension of the supreme obstacle to all betterment than have men of our day—viz., the depravity of human nature, and the resultant strength of disorder, truculence, and treachery. To some who are impatient of the present and careless of the past, those people who carry little baggage with them, the laborious studies, beliefs and aspirations of long vanished priests and publicists will appear as nothing more than the annals of incoherent error. But those who closely scrutinize the outstanding figures of mediæval life will not treat lightly or ignorantly religious leaders who established a world-society which bowed to spiritual as well as to temporal rule. This achievement marks the standing difference between the mediæval and the modern ages, and not a few enlightened souls devoutly wish it could be repeated in the twentieth century. Its forces are but dimly realized in a materialized and secular period. Nevertheless they once enshrined themselves in cathedrals and universities, in abbeys and schools, as the monuments of that “golden age of faith.” They were expressed in the royalty of St. Louis, the unrivaled intellect of St. Thomas, the beatific sanctity of St. Francis, the scholarly devotion of Roger Bacon, the epic of Dante, the eloquence of St. Bernard, and the statesmanship of Hildebrand. To unfriendly critics who look upon the centuries between the Apostolic age and that of Luther as a night of unclean things, it is apposite to say, Go and do likewise: tame the savage instincts of militarism and nationalism as those former Churchmen tamed turbulent aristocracies and rude peasantries; regenerate and confirm afresh, as they did, the unalterable belief in a Divine Order to be realized here and now. Their treasures were contained in frail and earthen vessels, but they mediated between their coarse surroundings and the ethereal ideals and emotions which seemed so distant from the grosser iniquities and grotesque customs of the time. Their strength came, as all

strength comes, from an exuberant vitality; an original passion which regarded every evil vulnerable, and every pursuit of holiness feasible.

Had that strength been exhausted, the saving succession of lawgivers and magistrates running through the center of Western life and morals would have been broken. Because it remained steadfast, Protestantism is here, as its joint heir with Catholicism; and it should pause to recall that its mighty ancestor, mediævalism, collapsed. The pressure of nominally Christian States was too heavy for the federalism of Church and Empire. They could beget but they could not govern them. While northern nations broadened in their ethical susceptibilities and political claims, the Papacy yielded to the fascinations of the Italian Renaissance. Its international sympathies narrowed, its traits and tendencies were provincialized. The glamor of rank and ritual, the remonstrance of a venerable hierarchy, the stilted formulas of Aristotelian theology, alike disappeared in countries beyond the Alps. A resistless tide of combined popular sentiment and intellectual rebellion submerged Catholicity, but at the same time it irrigated a germinal freedom the full fruition of which has still to be seen. The memories of that momentous rupture, charged as it was with good and evil, should sober every lover of religion as the keystone of social architecture.

I hold no brief for the traditional churches, yet what follows may perhaps be set down with propriety. The Eastern Church is at present torn asunder by wars and sorely afflicted by ruthless persecution. The Roman Catholic Church appears serene upon the surface, and wears the mantle of a comforting tranquillity. Yet its Bishops are conscious that no ecclesiastical organization is proof against the demands of democracy that it shall have limitless sway. They no longer negotiate with princes and premiers, but with the peoples, to whom the Popes address their appeals for social justice and international concord. Should the Holy See bring about a reconciliation with the Eastern Church, and the Eastern Church, purged by her martyrdom, transform her ministry to the Slavonic and Greek races, then the Reformed Churches must meet a counter stroke far more formidable than that dealt by Ignatius Loyola. Nor do I question

the motives behind this sagacious policy. It is inclusive, consolidating and preservative of things that should not be permitted to die. For there is no essential divinity in majority votes, and even democracy is liable to nod. Who, then, shall shepherd the shepherds themselves, even though they be the redoubtable champions of popular sovereignty? And where shall such a sovereignty obtain higher sanctions than numbers can confer?

II

Sons and daughters of the Reformation are under heavy bonds for the good behavior of Democracy, and of its concomitants in Nationalism, Socialism, Industrialism and Capitalism. Having helped to draw the wine, they have to regulate its drinking. Should it prove too heady a tippie for under-nourished brains and moralities, the world has a right to call upon Protestantism for an explanation and a remedy. It is easy to talk about the progress linked with our paternal faith; but there is no progress, as the term is usually understood, apart from ethical progress. Far more important than the sale of indulgences in the sixteenth century was the rise of Capitalism, the abolition of the old economics, the release of individual energies in other than spiritual avenues. The founders of modern trade and manufactures were sheltered by the spirit of revolt against hierarchies and feudalisms. Socialism and even Bolshevism now aim to supplant Capitalism as it once supplanted Feudalism. We witness the creation of a monstrous governmental engine in Russia, more complicated than those of mediæval monarchy and the Renaissance Papacy, and far more destructive of individual liberties, rights, and moral obligations. Protestants are dealing, not with Tetzels or a Medician Pontiff, but with Lenine, Trotzky, and other less notorious but scarcely less influential malcontents and despots. If the Reformers asserted anything, it was religious independence; freedom of conscience, of thought, of utterance, as against monopolized authority and uniformity of belief. Their protest created forces which travelled beyond their desires, and were reduced first to a spiritual, then, later, to a political philosophy. This philosophy culminated in the Revolutions of the eighteenth

century. The search for an economic philosophy ensued, and is now in process, embarrassed by selfishness and greed, and by the errors and crimes of preceding eras. We, as Protestants, cannot dodge the historical consequences of our ancestral policy. The prime service we can render the world is to set our own house in order, that we may wisely apply the teachings of the New Testament Evangel and of Old Testament ethics to the phenomena I have named. The useless quarrel with modern learning should cease. The wastes and confusions of denominationalism should be done away with. The foundations of a true social science should be laid, with allowances for the human equation. And not only Protestantism, but the whole Church of God, and all rightly disposed people, will have to find or make room in the divisive institutions of mankind for the universalism of which genuine Christianity is the living soul. In brief, reintegration by means of pacific interpenetration, and without concessions to the baser elements, is the capital business of the Church, as it is the crying necessity of the world. Probably it will be a slow process, moving with Time's ameliorating drift, and exterminating many cherished prejudices. But the course it takes is the important matter.

I do not plead for the pleasing of hypercritical ones who ask for better bread than can be made with wheat, nor for the satisfaction of anæmic starvelings who crave a fool-proof world. Still less, if possible, should apostles of the mundane be coddled. They would explain away every religious mystery, and sterilize the finest spiritual instincts. The jaded moods of the secularist are no more helpful than the fanatical harangues of the zealot. Too many suppose that men and women who have an intelligent faith should always retreat before those who either have it not or make it repellent to their fellows. The ostentatious triviality of much current opposition and fault finding is unable to conceive the realities of Protestant conviction. A great deal which is paraded as modern thought is not thinking at all, but simply a deplorable conglomerate of erroneous ideas which will not subside, despite repeated exposures. Illogical, capricious, irrelevant, this type of mind takes short cuts, in cross country fashion, to coveted conclusions. But there is an intellectual realm of true

scholarship, occupied by men of profound and scientific learning, which Protestants should regard with reverent affiliation. Our fellow Protestants have a large representation there, and they share in its illustrious achievements. Those mistaken clergymen and laymen who attempt to placate an effete orthodoxy by strangling the thinking and inquiry of that realm will fail, and they ought to fail. Believing souls cannot long escape the invasions of organized knowledge, nor is there any need to evade them. It is the sole function of science to deal with visible realities. It is the sole function of religion to deal with the boundless realities of the invisible universe. It is the function of a well equipped Church to heal the breaches of faith and intellectualism by its vital correspondence with the love of truth. The center of its trust is neither a creed, nor a book, nor a cosmogony, but a Person and a Life. It assimilates whatever is assimilable, because it administers the ultimate life and law of human being. It supplements science and learning without defaming them. Warned by its past annals and by the futility and hollowness of ecclesiastical conflicts with knowledge, it welcomes every verified conclusion as an addition to the truth which sanitates society. The research that matures and disciplines the reasoning faculties is grateful to such a Church, because its own vehicles for communicating spiritual verities are thereby enlarged. The casual and purposive interpretations which all learning presupposes and religion supplies are among the world's chief needs. It implores us for a spiritual ideal in more complete accord with the meditated experiences of life. And Protestantism should fulfil its request without forfeiting intellectual integrity at the behest of blind obscurantism.

III

The second measure of internal reform is the revival of Church consciousness and loyalty as differentiated from sectarian allegiance. The vine is more important than any single cluster of grapes that grows upon it. Unification, the opposite of separatism, is being carried onward by the swing of the pendulum. The rhythmic movements which govern everything, making day follow night, the tides ebb and flow, and even civilizations to

have their day and cease to be, are plainly pushing Protestantism toward a new and unaccustomed oneness as the forerunner of Catholicity. Voluntary consent is advisable and gracious, but a glacier-like thrust cannot be withstood. Our fate is never in our own hands; a fortunate thing indeed, and one which has repeatedly baffled the foes of the Church and heartened her offspring. Whatever are the merits of denominationalism, and certainly I do not doubt them, it has seen its meridian. Revised and corrected histories have induced in formerly fierce sectarians the virtues of sympathetic understanding and forbearance. Many rancorous disputes that the theological courts aggravated are composed by the evolutions which history describes. Those who observe aright the unfolding scheme of the Divine Society throughout the ages gain the true perspective which is the best criterion of the past. Without it, men magnify the meaningless, slight the important, and inflame the antagonistic. Protestantism cannot lodge order in chaos, lawfulness in freedom, unity in multiplicity, unless it reduces sectarian fervors and belittlements. The disruption of the Church has not been, and never can be, absolute. Her disciples coöperate in philosophy and dogmatics, in Biblical criticism and exegesis. Literature and hymnology testify to the one life which pulsates in her different branches.

Again, denominational cleavages are bequeathed rather than acquired: artificial rather than real. Men and women are born into their various denominations, and carry there marked temperamental differences. Every great religious body, as Dean Inge comments, has individual members who are natively institutionalists, or moralists, or mystics. And yet again, the antiquated causes of Protestant separatism have been mainly political and not religious. Not a few have lost their justification and persist as melancholy tokens of the combative spirit. Their isolations sever the Church from a sufficient jurisdiction over the spiritualities which are her peculiar care. She cannot well offset that apotheosis of the State which was the source of our recent undoing. It is to the Church, and not the State, that the distracted world should turn for a model organization, consisting of the entire congregation of the faithful, gathered out of every nation, fused into a spiritual homogeneity, and securely

founded upon righteousness, justice, mercy, and redemption. He is the benefactor of his age who thus conceives the Church, and esteems her capable of still higher unity, loyalty and efficiency. The second contribution of Protestantism to the world's sorest needs should be a first class example of fraternal unification. That world which refuses to be either entirely Protestant or Catholic does not desire Christians to make a transient truce, but to arrive at a just and settled peace within their ecclesiastical borders. Until they do so, what right have they to preach peace to separated and suspicious States?

IV

Dr. Robert William Dale, in his tribute to the Evangelical Revival, contrasted its success in religious individualism with its failure to bring about social betterment. Some intense Evangelicals of today seem determined to maintain this woeful disparity. They resent the entrance of the Gospel into the broader relationships of life and disparage what may be termed the spiritualized communism of their brethren. Yet the humanities inspired by the Gospel are its unanswerable apologetic, while non-social extortion which combines plunder with prayer is a stumbling block to Protestantism and an offense to mankind. Commerce and its sustaining trades and industries have grown to huge proportions since the sixteenth century. The subsequent multiplication of classes and groups, the bitterness engendered by constant disputes between employers and employees, the secession of millions of artisans and workers from the ranks of church membership, compel the sorry admission that after two thousand years of tenure institutional Christianity has yet to present to the world an adequate plan for the insurance of social justice.

Protestantism should approach the social problem aware that the mass, as distinguished from the self, must be upraised by consecrated Christians who surrender themselves, not from fear of the domination of the unfit, but in the spirit of brotherhood, to coöperation as against competition. To be passive before known wrongs or content to purvey to exclusive circles withdrawn from the grim realities of toil and poverty, breeds the exotic religiosity which cripples some Protestant pulpits, and

makes their respectability a byword. On the other hand, the recoil from these affectations has caused many Protestant clergymen and laymen to rush to the other extreme and there inject the virus of misstatement and exaggeration into their utterances on social issues, disdainful of the delirium that may follow. It is not by chance that the hopeful features of a just economic, as immune from the plagues of anarchy as from those of autocracy, are found in Christian commonwealths. We shall enhance its future by faithfully dispensing the Gospel of righteousness which covers all theories of social betterment as the sky over-arches the landscape. It is regrettable that this has not been done sooner and more generally. Formerly there was no raving about eradicating the evils of capitalism by confiscation, nor were the earlier social reformers the enemies of property as such. But while Churchmen were vainly perturbed about explanations of the Trinity or the duration of the future punishment of sin, Marx and his associates proposed, under the shadow of dynastic autocracy, that men, instead of sharing their poverty, should share their wealth.

Socialism administered by the collectivist State has little in common with Christianity. Its essence and aims are frankly materialistic. For the godless and the cruel it has become a creed of force, and they have made it the predacious evil of the time. For its more amenable adherents it is the creed of peace, to be reduced to practice by persuasion, and the decisions of the majority. Other followers who cannot detect its inverted dogmatisms and subterfuges are Socialists mainly because of the manifest inequalities which fortify those dogmatisms and subterfuges. The sane verdict rendered by responsible thinkers of the Anglican Church is that prevalent economic abuses are not the accidental but the normal product of the present system. This verdict, once it is adopted by Protestantism, as I hold it must be, will end its fatalistic attitude toward social iniquities. It will then proceed to their extermination as its third primal duty. America's low valuation of human material, the smug arrogance of its native citizens, its reluctance to admit citizens of other races to reasonable social and commercial fellowship, are rapidly disappearing. We are learning that we have received more emigration than we can digest, and that in our haste

to exploit national resources, we have retarded national progress. Surely in the United States, if anywhere, Protestantism can develop its nascent Catholicity by means of a cosmopolitan life which furnishes even more material than we ask.

V

The last and perhaps the greatest immediate service which Protestantism can render the world is to redress the balance between Church and State. Behind the seething spirit of revolt and the wild stirrings of public opinion lies a deep seated distrust of nationalism as the source of war. Since Hegel announced that the State was absolute, an end in itself, and the organon of its own moralities, the cult of militarism has been both exalted and cast down. Its semi-divinities are now depressed but not vanquished. The peoples of Europe, betrayed by perfidious rulers, are obsessed with fear lest the Hegelian doctrine should revive, and another Baal be set up in blood and terror. It is this dread which explains three-fourths of our international and diplomatic imbroglios. Revolutionary labor, pleas and counter pleas for the mutilation or the restoration of Germany, the French alliances with Poland, secret treaties with the Turk, and the chronic excitement of the Balkan States, can be traced to the determination that the white race must not permit another orgy of massacre. Protestants who believe that the leadership of that race will not survive a second world war see no possibility of preventing it save by the increased control of Christianity over international affairs. But to gain the control, they must be Christians first, and nationalists afterwards. Situated as we are, between Pagan traditions which ennoble tribal relations and war, and Christian teachings which pledge its end in universal brotherhood, the choice must be made as to which we shall hereafter obey. For had not the Church been narrowly defined by nationalistic boundaries, and defiled by an idolatrous subservience to the State, the good the late war accomplished might have been obtained without shedding of blood, and the incalculable evil it left in its train might have been avoided.

Whatever may be said in praise of patriotism, surely it is limited by righteousness and subordinate to justice! There is

need for lucid thinking at this point. The conception of the State as a concrete part of the "Absolute" in which all opposites are reconciled, suits Cæsarism, but it does not explain the verities forced upon us by dreadful circumstances. This "Absolute" has neither organism nor purpose. It is neither personal nor impersonal. It possesses no qualities for good or evil. Its asserted perfection is a myth. As a metaphysical dream, skilfully elaborated, without moral character or consistency, Hegel's ideal is a striking illustration of the havoc wrought by erroneous speculation. It destroys the freedom of the individual by consigning him, body and soul, to the State. The essential differences between the State and the Church and between the State and society at large are lost in the process of consignment. Because much organized human life is outside the purview of the State, its alignments traverse State frontiers. The reaction against the fatal heresy that the State is unconditional and supreme should be promoted and yet restrained by the Church. The moral attainments which she emphasizes are produced by self-determination as against mere impulse. But how can self-determination operate if the State is all and in all? Protestantism has a mission to guard the ethical and religious truths which enrich every political heritage. It can show that the claims of the individual upon the State and of the State upon the individual are reciprocal. But both sets of claims are conditioned by the fact that man's obligations as a spiritual being must be duly honored. The State is a body of persons, recognized by each other as having rights, and having a constitution for the maintenance of those rights. Thus, while the State is more important than any citizen, it cannot be indifferent to the rights of any single citizen. The Church is, as I have said, the congregation of God's faithful people upon the earth, who unreservedly accept the spirit, the life, and the teachings of Jesus Christ as their standards of belief and practice. And if theocracy as taught by the Bible is the one lasting foundation of democracy, blessed is that people whose God is the Lord! And equally blessed is that State which applies Biblical precepts to belated and brutal conditions of old time internationalism.

S. PARKES CADMAN.